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EDUCATION AS A HUMAN RIGHT: THE RISE OF THE HBCUS

A EDUCAÇÃO COMO UM DIREITO HUMANO: A ASCENSÃO DO HBCUS

L'ÉDUCATION COMME DROIT DE L'HOMME: L'AMERIQUE DU HBCUS

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ABSTRACT

HBCUs (Historically black colleges and universities) are both a representation of education as a human right and education that facilitates the fight for human rights.HBCUs were and remain crucial to the development of human rights activismin the US.

Key words:HBCU Activism. Black Professors. Black professionals. Human Rights. Black Education

RESUMO

As HBCUs (As faculdades e universidades historicamente negras) são tanto uma representação da educação como um direito humano quanto uma educação que facilita a luta pelos direitos humanos. As HBCUs foram e continuam sendo cruciais para o desenvolvimento do ativismo pelos direitos humanos nos Estados Unidos.

Palavras-chave: HBCU Ativismo. Professores Negros. Profissionais negros. Direitos humanos. Educação Negra

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RÉSUMÉ

Les HBCU (Collèges et universités historiquement noirs) sont à la fois une représentation de l'éducation en tant que droit humain et une éducation qui facilite la lutte pour les droits humains. Les HBCU ont été et restent cruciales pour le développement de l'activisme des droits de l'homme aux États-Unis.

Mots clés: Activisme HBCU. Professeurs noirs. Professionnels noirs. Droits humains. Éducation des Noirs

INTRODUCTION

In the United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, state representatives declared that every human being possessed certain rights which are inherent, universal, indivisible, interdependent, inalienable, equal, and non-discriminatory.Responsibilities are contiguous to the human rights—states must respect, protect, and guarantee enjoyment of the rights for residents and citizens are charged with respecting and defending the rights of others (UN, 2021). Within the Declaration, UN members specified the inherent right to free education at the primary and ‘fundamental stage’ levels, along with widely available technical and professional education and ‘equally accessible’ higher education based on merit (UN, 2018).

Two centuries before representatives of UN member nations collaborated and formalised the definition of human rights, United States (US) leaders from the political, business, and religious sectors crafted policies that prohibited the education of enslaved Africans. At the end of a bitter civil war and the emancipation of the slaves in 1865, tenacious Blacks and influential white stakeholders established common schools and advocated for higher education facilities for the African American community. Although the citizens differed in their perceptions of the meaning of Black higher education and the purpose of Black professionals, the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) resulted from their collective toil.

According to the US Department of Education, HBCUs are defined as any accredited[1] historically Black college or university established before 1964 primarily to serve African American students (HIGHER EDUCATION ACT OF 1965, 1965). Currently 102 schools located in nineteen states, the District of Columbia, and the US Virgin Islands, meet these criteria. Two- and four-year institutions, public and private, are represented. Like other colleges and universities, each school has its own campus culture, academic specialisations, and community missions(LOVETT, 2015). Despite the organisational differences, the missions of the HBCU are nearly the same—the staff, faculty, students, and community members commit to advancing education and human rights. In this piece, we assert that HBCUs were and remain crucial to the evolution of Black education and human rights activism in the US. A briefpresentation ofthe historical development of the HBCUs;their collective mission, and reflections on the HBCU legacy of human rights activism will be discussed.

US Colonial Values of Education

Early in US history, the European migrants held divided views of education. The residentsdebated the meaning of education, who could create knowledge, who could contribute to the fledgling disciplinary canons, what knowledge was valuable, and who had access knowledge. Since the establishment of the colony, some of the most contentious debates surrounded the education of the colonised Native Americans, landless Europeans, and enslaved Africans(FEIR, 2016; WILLIAMS, 2005).In practical terms, only wealthy members of societyhad the precious time and financial resources required for education(CAIN; HOPKINS, 1986); others in the lower socio-economic classes struggled for basic survival in the colony. Education guaranteed access to the political, economic, and social networks comprised of the elite class (SILER-HOLLOMAN, 2020).

[1] HBCUs must be accredited or seeking accreditation from an agency or association recognized by the US Department of Education.

In 1619, the first African slaves were brought to the colony and by 1680, the Black slaves were enshrined in law as property. The dominant class considered Blacks to be 'brutish' creatures, similar to livestock(FINKELMAN, 2012, P. 114; JORDAN, 1968, PP. 44–56). The typical school curriculum of classical education in ancient language, logic, history, mathematics, and philosophy was viewed as unnecessary for the slaves. Blacks were believed to be intellectually inferiorand classical knowledge would not advance the agrarian skills the slaves needed on the plantations.However, the fear created the 1739 Stono Rebellion(THORNTON, 1991; VOX, 2018) served to dispute the belief in Black inferiority and criminalize the educational, political, economic, and social activities of the slaves for nearly a century.

The Fear of the Educated Black Man

Whereas the education of slaves was previously viewed as an innocuous subject, slaverebellionsfocussed the attention of the white citizenry and transformed the perception of Black education into a destructive force. Whilst incomplete documentation makes the actual number of insurrections (events identified as rebellions of ten or more slaves) difficult to verify, scholars estimated the number upwards of three hundred or more between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries(WENDT, 2009). Scholars have concurred that Stono Rebellion in South Carolina was one of the largest, costliest, and,ultimately, most influential in solidifying stricter social relations between whites and slaves and establishing more strategic slave business (SILER-HOLLOMAN, 2020; THORNTON, 1991).

Thornton deduced that many of the slaves had either been trained by colonialists for militia service or that the participating Africans were former soldiers captured in war. He was able to verify through documentation that the leader of the rebellion slaves was a highly educated and militarily-trained African, named Jemmy, from the region known as Angola[2](THORNTON, 1991, p. 1102). After one week of battles with

[2] For more on the Stono Rebellion and other slave revolts, visit the Library of Congress website, *America's Story*goo.gl/cA4UzZ or the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) website with Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The African Americans:Many rivers tocross*goo.gl/xVD6dK.

the white militia, the rebellion ended and the deceased were counted as twenty-one white residents and forty-four slaves (VOX, 2018). Despite the dominant culture narratives about the 'docile' Black men, the white plantation owners and residents remained quite afraid of possible uprisings, therefore, politicians crafted policies to assuage the fears.

One of the first statutes after the Stono Rebellion was the Negro Act of 1740(PINCKNEY, 1740). Several times within the document, the legislators referred to the rebellions and the strategies used by resourceful and clever Black men. To exert control over the slave activity and preserve safety for the white community, the Act outline new rules of engagement for the slaves. Rules included the constraint of movement, property ownership, entrepreneurship, social gatherings, and education—all persons who taught Black slaves to read or write faced a variety of sanctions by the courts—thereby rendering the material and human resources necessary for rebellions inaccessible or extremely limited. Though formal and legal rules pertaining to Black slaves existed before the Stono Rebellion, a plethora of Black Codes were enacted throughout all the territories of the US(MCCORD, 1840; SILER-HOLLOMAN, 2020).

Subversive Black Education

Despite threats of violence and death by property owners, public members, and law enforcement authorities, Blacks, both slave and free, continued to value and seek education. Whilst some slave owners allowed their slaves to obtain *bible literacy,*meaning they could learn to read, not write, in order to fully practice the Christian faith, the Black subersives deployed a plethora of secret strategies to obtain education. (CORNELIUS, 1983, pp. 171–173). More the case, Black men, women, and children taught themselves, learned from, and taught each other, effectively 'stealing' education(CORNELIUS, 1983). La'Neice Littleton(2014) posited that because of their curiosity, persistence, and creativity, the slave children were the basis of the Black literacy movement and the precursors of the Civil Rights Movement. Using abolition-

ists Frederick Douglass, William W. Brown and Harriet Jacob as examples, Littleton proclaims these children of slaves 'made the improbable transition from beasts of burden to intellectual powerhouses' and led the fight for the human rights of their community (LITTLETON, 2014, pp. 105–110). Before and after the Thirteen-thAmendment abolished slavery, education was a priority for Black people as it represented freedom, security, social mobility, and, eventually it was hoped, acceptance by the dominant society members. However, in order to become students, the Blacks first had to undermine the *de jure* and *de facto* constraints of their education.

Rise of the HBCUs

The founding, financing, and development of higher education in the US was thoroughly intertwined with the economic and social forces that transformed West and Central Africa through the slave trade and devastated Indigenous nations in the Americas. According to Craig Steven Wilder, the academy was a beneficiary and defender of these processes with its college graduates 'exploit[ing] these links for centuries' as professional 'teachers, ministers, lawyers, doctors, politicians, merchants, and planters (WILDER, 2013). After thirteenth admendment of the US Constitution abolished slavery and involuntary servitude, the need developed to secure their economic advantages and professional network exclusivity. Within the seemingly progressive legal and informal policies crafted by the elite professionals to facilitate Black education, the Black community discovered the continuing need to advocate for their human right within the dominant class controlled educational system.

Justin Smith Morrill, a US politician from the state of Vermont, was a self-educated man who, unable to afford the university education he longed for. Morrill sponsored a bill in 1857 that would provide land grants to states for the purpose of establishing the agricultural and mechanical colleges to serve two purposes—to educate the 'common' man and, through research contributions, bolster the American industrialisation(MORRILL, n.d.). Despite his support of education in general, Presi-

dent James Buchanan, Jr. vetoed the bill due to his belief that the individual states were responsible for funding higher education (LUCAS, 1994).

Five years and another political administration later, Morrill presented the proposed statute again with success. In 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed the first Morrill Act into law. Because the Southern states wanted to secede from the Federal government, the citizens in those states forfeited their right to receive the grants (USDA, n. d.).

Although Morrill legislation was an important part in the establishment of universities for the 'common' man, Blacks were initially prohibited from receiving benefit from the Act by Southern anti-literacy laws. Though the Black Codes were instituted due to fear of Black education, ironically, the attendees of the 1890 Mohonk Conference on *The Negro Question*[3] believed that it would be the education of the freed Black people that would 'safeguard' the order of the increasingly progressive, industrialized society.

The Negro Problem?

During the Progressive Era, white politicians, philanthropists, Christian missionaries, business leaders, abolitionists and educators, in efforts to fulfil their 'noble cause[s]', advocated for the industrial training of the freed people (PIFER, 1973). The owner of the Lake Mohonk Mountain House, A. K. Smiley, was a Quaker who strongly believed that it was a Christian duty to protect the minorities of the United States. Between 1883 and 1916, the House served as a conference centre for not only the first convention to discuss 'The Negro Question' but as the site for conferences concerning Indigenous Peoples and international peace.

The conferences about the Native Americans were attended by civic leaders who labelled themselves, 'Friends of the Indians' with the goal of 'eradicat[ing], tribal identities' and assimilating the group into society by training children at special board-

[3] For additional reading on the famous *Negro Question* debate, see David Theo Goldberg's article, *Liberalism's limits: Carlyle and Mill on "the Negro Question",* https://doi.org/10.1080/08905490008583508.

ing schools (PBS, 2001). The same label could have been applied to the group assembled in New York to address the major issue of their day—what to do with the free Negroes. Among this group, handpicked by Smiley, was Rutherford B. Hayes, the former US president who oversaw the Reconstruction period after the Civil War; General Samuel C. Armstrong, Union Army officer and founder of Hampton Institute, an HBCU; as well as William T. Harris, a famous American educator. Each of the participants seem to have observed the negative effects of slavery on the black community; many had worked closely with the freedmen in a variety of conditions. In his opening address, Smiley shared his goal of the conference with the attendees:

> I trust that everyone who is here agrees with me that it is exceedingly important for the Negroes to be elevated in every direction; that it is necessary that they should be practically educated; that they shall learn to be thrifty and taught industries; that they shall do away with all drinking habits, shall save money, accumulate property, be law-abiding citizens; that the family relations shall be well observed, and thus be a credit to our country. I believe, if they are not so educated, that they will become a dangerous element to the community, liable to be thrown at any moment into the hands of demagogues who may use them for bad purposes. I believe that our only safety is to give the Negro a Christian education. This is what we are called together to consider"(BARROW, 1890, p. 8).

Not surprisingly, neither Black educators, activists, nor religious leaders were invited to attend the conference or submit their comments as to the economic, political, or educational development of their community members. In his historical evaluations of the period from the emancipation of slaves to 1933, Carter G. Woodson wryly observed how Black representatives are barred from decision-making processes concerning their education:

> The usual way now is for the Whites to work out their plans behind closed doors, have them approved by a few Negroes serving nominally on a board, and then employ a White or mixed staff to carry out their program. This is not interracial cooperation. It is merely the ancient idea of calling upon the "inferior" to carry out the orders of the "superior"(WOODSON, 1933).

At the conference, the attendees determined the type of curriculum and geographic location of the Black schools. The proposed training programmes of Christian

and industrial education were favoured by attendees. Such a feat required Black teachers for the estimated six million Black citizens. As the geographic legacy of slavery confine the black freedmen to the plantations after emancipation, the majority of the black population lived in the southern region of the United States (MANDLE, 1994, p. 23) and many of the proposed education institutes were constructed within. In the late 1800s, the Northern citizens did not relish the thought of a vast migration of blacks to their areas; even the Northern supporters of the black community wanted to guarantee that the blacks stayed as far south as possible. 'Educate the Negro where he is,' said Rev. A. D. Mayo at the Mohonk Conference (BARROW, 1890). Similar thinking amongst leaders deemed that the strategic placement of all but four of the new Black colleges were establishedin the South. A testament to the influence and power of the Conference attendees, in less than three months after the Mohonk Conference, President Benjamin Harrison (1833-1901) signed the Second Morrill Act of 1890.

Disparate Provision for the HBCUs

Whilst the Second Morrill Act of 1890[4] was primarily intended for the higher education of white citizens, with the inclusion of the southern region and the newest western states, the legislators specified federal funds to states for the advanced education of the Black community. The Act requires state representatives a choice of either policies that allowed Black student admission into predominately white institutions (PWIs) or separate, equitable institutions for the Black community; the southern state representatives opted for the establishment of the HBCUs.

Despite the Morrill Act requirement of equal support for both HBCU and PWI institutions, the Black schools suffered from disparate policies regarding the distribution of federal funds(SEALS, 1986). Travis J. Albritton noted that compared to the 'exponential' growth of PWIs at the dawn of the twentieth century, the paltry financial

[4] For more information on the Morrill Acts, visit the US Library of Congress website, https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/morrill.html

support of the HBCUs resulted in the inhibition of institutional growth and development, as evidenced by the example of Alabama (ALBRITTON, 2012, p. 316). Between 1900 and 1916, one Alabama PWI received sixteen times the amount allotted for the comparable HBCU (ALBRITTON, 2012; JENKINS, 1991, p. 66). Albritton argues that racial discrimination 'limited [HBCUs] in their capacity to provide the necessary resources to educate [Black] students . . . for years to come' (ALBRITTON, 2012).

Private and Public Control of HBCUs

Although the US federal government allocated support for the HBCUs, Christian organisations were instrumental in building primary, secondary, and postsecondary schools for the Black community. The American Missionary Association ('Association'), one of the most influential religious groups in the US, was formed in 1846 to spread Christian values and oppose slavery. After the civil rights victory ended in the emancipation of slaves, the missionaries redirected their efforts to supporting the freed people with their future in society. The Association belief in strict morality and 'right living' was part of the Protestant work ethic perceived necessary to elevate the nation to a world power in the nineteenth century.As part of their contribution to the religious missionand national goals, the Association founded eleven HBCUs and funded the recruitment and salaries of teachers for the southern schools. (JEWELL, 2007, p. 31–32).

Whilst the new mission may be viewed as simple charity, Joseph O. Jewell (2007) found complex motivations for the continued interests in the Black community during his study of the Association strategies in Atlanta, Georgia, between 1870 and 1900. The mostly northern Association members viewed themselves as the 'embodiment of Christian morality' and were proud of the middle class status they earned through respectable work ethics rather than inheritance (JEWELL, 2007). In his research, several issues concerning the Black community emerged within the Association. Although the missionaries desired to continue their work, they were deeply con-

cerned about how the elevation of Blacks would impact their lives and livelihoods. Educated and professional Black men and women posed, the missionaries believed, threats to the national stability with their 'outsider' status and to class boundaries by 'outsider' social mobility attempts (JEWELL, 2007).

The Association leadership discussed the state of the freed people in the evolving nation during their meetings and in their publications, delineating their version of the 'Negro Problem'. Although the members acknowledge the extremely low rates of literacy due to the Black Codes, groups and individuals of 'sympathetic' whites spoke often of the 'long heredity' of 'cultural backwardness', degradations, and ignorance of Black community members (JEWELL, 2007). The Association members agreed that they shouldered significant Christian burdens to assist the Blacks in rising from the mire of their status and help the grieving nation heal. Many of the Association members analysed the magnitude of the tasks and deduced that success required 'generations of time' to enlighten and elevate Blacks due to their propensity towards immoral vices, including 'falsehood, theft and adultery in which the Negroes have been schooled all their lives' (JEWELL, 2007). Apparently, Jewell discovered, the Association members were concerned that aspects of the Black 'Indigenous' culture would be implanted in the emerging US society (JEWELL, 2007). As a counter to the threats, education and Anglo-Protestant middle class values among the 'upwardly mobile) Blacks were chosen as tools in the Association scheme (JEWELL, 2007).

As reported by Jewell, the Black community had their own ideas about education. He stated that upon the arrival of the Association members in Atlanta, almost two hundred students of all ages were enrolled in a school founded by literate former slaves, James Tate and Grandison Daniels. Though Tate and Daniels relinquished their control of the school to the missionaries who promised the investment of human and financial resources, some Blacks, such as the Bethel AME minister Francis J. Peck, critiqued the Association degradation of well-established Black institutions, obtrusion into Black community affairs and domination of school curriculum, preferring

self-reliance to outsider control (JEWELL, 2007). Still, the investments from the Black community and Association proved fruitful. Parents, faculty and administrators relished the high academic performances of the Association Storrs Free School students, who excelled, as posited by Jewell, from 'an education largely unfettered by race' (JEWELL, 2007).

The educational successes of the Black students were not ignored by the broader Atlanta community. In addition to the stakeholders, the white supremacists in the city monitored the progress of the dedicated efforts of the Black community members and Association to establish educational institutions for their children. Based on the meritocratic rewards earned by white citizens, Blacks laboured with the expectation that their earnest attempts to uplift themselves through education and work would result in generational wealth and security. White supremacists, however, perceived those efforts as threats to their tenuous middle-class statuses and the future opportunities for their offspring (JEWELL, 2007).

Jewell found that white citizens used political means to avert any further development of Black educational institutions, both private and public. In 1869, concerned white citizens of the Committee on Public Schools petitioned the city council to establish a board of education in the hopes that a centralised body would thwart the plans of unwelcome northern missionaries and Black scholars. The author ascertained that the board members reproduced the unequal racial boundaries by mandating the 'form, content, and physical setting of the education received by Blacks in comparison to whites' (JEWELL, 2007). Despite the 1870 Georgia state law requiring funding equality for both Black and white schools, the board resolutions to control Black education encompassed city bond manipulation, state law noncompliance, fund diversion, and missionary teacher employment terminations. These measures resulted in only two schools to serve the numerous Black community children, disparate financing for Black facilities, and discriminatory hiring of white southern females charged with teaching Black students 'proper' racial hierarchies that maintained white superiority (JEWELL, 2007).

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HBCUActivism

Despite the exclusion of Black scholars and community leaders from the patriarchal Mohonk conference, constraint by white supremacists, and the manipulation by missionaries, Black people in the late nineteenth century worked diligently to worked to ensure the survival of the HBCUs, educate their students, and politicise their community members. According to Travis J. Albritton, protecting human rights has been a significant part of the HBCU experience from the beginning of their existence. Although the newly freed slaves 'appreciated' the financial and political support of the Northern white Christian allies, the Black community possessed a deep commitment to education even before the interventions of the missionaries. Like the early colonists, the Black community members associated the opportunity of education with not only economic advancement but with 'resistance, empowerment and social uplift' as the faculty and students 'acquired new skills to use in their fight for equality and justice' (ALBRITTON, 2012).

Walter Allen (1992) delineated six common HBCU goals for the education of Black students and promotion of the Black community:

1. Cultural guardians--Preservation of Black historical legacies, cultural traditions, and cultural influences flowing from the Black community.

2. Civic models--Provision of Black community leadership through the institutions' staff, faculty, and student activism roles.

3. Economic contributors—Budgetary influx into Black communities where schools located, provided employment, student spending within surrounding neighbourhoods.

4. Critical analysts—scholars interpret political, economic, and social dynamics of Black community.

5. Solution generators—alumni 'address issues between the minority and majority populations groups' through their public, private, and voluntary sector work.

6. Scholarship creation—faculty and staff conduct research, facilitate training, and propagate information vital to the 'life environment' of minority communities (BROWN II, DAVIS, 2001).

Early colonial higher education was designed to train the white leaders of society; Black Codes were crafted to prohibit the education of slaves to protect white society. When social and economic needs of the nation changed, the interests of politicians, academics, religious leaders in the education of Blacks converged with those of Black community members. The dichotomies found in the US reverence for liberty and the oppression of Black labourers was also observed by researchers in the attitudes toward the education of Blacks—education was not seen as a human right for Blacks, poor people, or other minorities. The forms of education most desired for the acquisition and expansion of knowledge were deemed unfit for the Black community. Whilst the national leaders insisted that the focus of education was diverted from the classical or liberal studies to the industrial education for economic benefit of Blacks, overt racist beliefs of the inferiority of black intellectual capabilities, the paternalistic assumptions that Blacks needed guidance to direct their educational pursuits, and the segregation of Black students revealed much more about the white American need to maintain control of Black labour. For Black slaves and, later, Black freed-people, education was viewed as their human right. Education was crucial for their development as human beings, as security in workplaces, part of their civic duty, and a way to uplift the 'race'.

The Collective HBCU Mission

The Black community's insatiable desire for education, the birth of HBCUs, and the challenge to exist fostered, within their walls, the fight for human rights (WHEATLE; COMMODORE, 2019). As African Americans realised early in their history, human rights are not often guaranteed by mere birth; they must be demanded. As DuBois stated on the topic of HBCUs:

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> We hold the possible future in our hands but not by wish and will, only by thought, plan, knowledge, and organization. If the college can pour into the coming age an American Negro who knows himself and his plight and how to protect himself and fight race prejudice, then the world of our dream come and not otherwise (DU BOIS, 1973, p. 132).

HBCUs created an environment in which serving others and promoting human rights is just as important as obtaining a higher education qualification. This pattern of academics, agitation, and activism makes up a part of HBCUs' collective mission. The mission and vision of an institution provides purpose and a direction for its community (ABELMAN, MOLINA, 2006). It is each institution's vision that often keeps them viable. Often educational institutions neglect to realize the impact a mission and vision statement can make as it moves beyond the campus, staff, and students. (FOX, NOVAK, 1997, p. 3–7).

In their research on HBCU mission and vision statements, Abelman and Dalessandro found that HBCUs' collective historical mission of providing Blacks with access to higher education is their mainstay (ABELMAN, DALESSANDRO, 2009). According to the authors, the *mission* statement defines the 'physical, social, fiscal, and political context in which that institution exists'; the *vision* statement 'transcends' the preceding characteristics by uplifting the institution through quality standards that make it 'distinctive, coherent, and appealing' (ABELMAN, DALESSANDRO, 2009) The analysis concluded that HBCUs typically do not have lasered vision statements as PWIs, which the authors designate as a hinderance in the promotion of institutional individuality of environment and curriculum (ABELMAN, DALESSANDRO, 2009). Yet, as several individual HBCUs struggle for their survival (BROWN, CHRISTOPHER, 2011; WAYMER, STREET, 2016) and some have been especially near to the closure of their schools[5](MHUTE, 2019), perhaps it is the internal quest to preserve human rights that may explain why the institutions still exist. No other col-

[5] As of October 2020 are fully accredited by the Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools (TRACS), however, Bennett College was facing closure as it had not received its accreditation. (www.bennett.edu, n.d.).

lective group of institutions have fought for the human right to educate Blacks harder or longer than HBCUs.

Diversity and Inclusivity Before Political Correctness

Due to both necessity and the aim to model human rights activism, HBCUs managed to create spaces that included women and other diverse faculty members well before mid-twentieth century legislation prompted such actions within PWIs.

Research into HBCU Black women professors (HOLLOMAN, 2019, Chapter One) found that three HBCUs were founded or co-founded by women: Elizabeth E. Wright (Voorhees College); Artemisia Bowden (St. Philip's College); and Mary McLeod-Bethune (Bethune-Cookman University). All three institutions were headed by African American women before women's suffrage in 1920. Education as a human right was so important that these ladies literally travelled begged potential wealthy patrons for donations to build schools, even at great danger to themselves and their students. To quote Mary McLeod-Bethune:

> The whole world opened to me when I learned to read. As soon as I understood something, I rushed back and taught it to the others at home. That same day the teacher opened the Bible to John 3:16 and read: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life"….With these words the scales fell from my eyes and the light came flooding in. My sense of inferiority, my fear of handicaps, dropped away (BETHUNE, 1941, p. 33).

HBCUs have never restricted the race of its faculty members. Although their typical students are of African descent, most HBCUs have had whites heavily involved in their origins and governance (SILER-HOLLOMAN, 2020). The combination of white governance, limited funds and other factors may be a reason why HBCUs have needed to pull faculty from a diverse pool as PWIs were not accepting of various 'others' leading classrooms. A highly unknown example are the immigrant Jewish lecturers who worked on HBCU campuses as they were shunned in other institutions after World War II(DANCY, 2001; LOWE, 2008). In more recent times research

has shown the HBCUs have some of the most diverse faculty of colleges and universities in the US (FOSTER, 2001; GASMAN, NGUYEN, 2015).

Past HBCU Agitators

HBCUs are incubators for human activism. Whether on a local or international scale HBCU leaders, faculty, students, and alumnus have led the charge in promoting education, voting, civil, women, and human rights. One of the earliest agitators was Anna Julia Cooper (1858-1964), a graduate of St. Augustine's University and sociologist and pioneer of Pan-Africanism. One of the most famous sociologists, W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963), graduate of Fisk University, was a prominent scholar, activist, and co-founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Although she could not complete her degree at Rust College nor Fisk University due to financial burdens, HBCU-educated Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862-1931) travelled throughout the US and Europe speaking on issues such as women's rights and the lynching of Blacks; she was also a co-founder of the NAACP. Booker T. Washington (1856-1915), a graduate of Hampton University, was the founder of Tuskegee University, an HBCU the students literally built with their hands as they learned. Widely known for his provocative speech about Black and white group relations during the 1895 Atlanta Exposition, Washington was a strong believer in industrial education for Blacks as a pathway towards economic independence and racial equity.

Moving forward more into the twentieth century, HBCUs cultivated a hosts of activists: Medgar Evers (1925-1963) (Alcorn State University); Rev. Pauli Murray (1910-1985) (Howard University); Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) (Morehouse College); Septima P. Clark (1898-1987) (Hampton University); Kwame Nkrumah (1909-1972) (Lincoln University of Pennsylvania); and Rev. Jessie Jackson (1941-) (North Carolina A&T State University).

Legacy of the HBCUs

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The impact of HBCUs is far greater than the alumni who rise to world recognition, such as, the first woman and Black-Asian Vice President, Kamala Harris; a graduate of Howard University. Despite representing only three percent of all US colleges and universities, HBCUs enrol nine percent of all African American students (NCES, 2021) having a tremendous impact on their communities. HBCUs have long been perceived as institutions on the periphery by the dominant culture—never understanding the importance of the HBCU culture. For those students who attend these schools, HBCUs are often home or an extension of home. This is perhaps the reason why HBCUs graduates feel more prepared for the workforce and have better well-being than African Americans who graduate from PWIs (SEYMOUR,RAY, 2015).

The many HBCU alumni, beacons in their communities, effect daily change on a local level. According to the Thurgood Marshall College Fund, eighty percent of Black judges; fifty percent of Black PWI faculty; fifty percent of Black lawyers; and forty percent of Blacks in Congress graduated from an HBCU (THURGOOD MARSHALL COLLEGE FUND, 2019). Furthermore, at least fifty percent of African American public school teachers are HBCU alumni (FENWICK, 2016, p. 6). The legacy of the HBCUs extend beyond the names of the pioneers and Civil Rights Activists. It also includes the behavioural health counsellor, the theatre actors, the reading teacher, the city attorney, the nurse, and the administrative assistant who fight for the inalienable rights, human rights, of all, thus moving humanity forward.

CONCLUSION

The Historically Black Colleges and Universities have a unique place in the US higher education system; they represent both education as a human right and the fight for human rights. The HBCU narrative is a tenacious crusade for education of the nation, for the production of social activists, and for themission of universal equity amongst all human beings.

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Black Gold

The dream grown young, mined from the depths of a people that were shackled.
Allies and Missionaries believing in equality offered their land and space for a prayer to take root.
Trees grew and black gold blossomed from the ashes of strange fruit.
Destiny manifested in brick buildings and freedom was discovered in the hidden words.

Melanated bodies isolated within the segregated ivory tower invited for an inclusive education.
Feeding minds with the words of black and brown pioneers.
Feeding the surrounding community with hands clasped in solidarity.
Sitting in Whites Only and protesting the separation of colour.
Our education with white pearls and bow ties prepared us to ignite movement.

Talented Tens of Thousands, generations later and the black gold shines.
Our drumlines create melodious reminders of the black experience.
And...We... Step, accordingly, synchronizing our hands with our hearts.
Our intellect and culture permeate the fibres that stich together the quilt of America.
We are the Dream realized; no longer deferred.

I am the daughter of Giovanni and Walker.
You are the child of Ellison and Hughes.
I am the sister of Badu and Boseman.
You are the sibling of King and Washington.
We are the flames from the beacon that burns brightly.
We carry the song of legacy as we wear black gold crowns on our heads.

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